

16. (Amended) An optical reader for scanning-decoding at least one optically encoded symbol, the optical reader comprising:

a communications interface adapted to communicate with an external device;
an imaging assembly for scanning the at least one optically encoded signal to thereby produce digital imaging data; and
processing means for,

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receiving the digital imaging data from the imaging assembly,
decoding the digital imaging data in accordance with an optical reader program stored in an optical reader memory,
loading an externally generated program into the optical reader memory via the communications interface, the externally generated program corresponding to a new task, and
executing the externally generated program to thereby perform the new task, whereby executing the externally generated program includes replacing at least a portion of the optical reader program.

19. (Amended) A method for instructing an optical reader to perform a task it is not programmed to perform, the method comprising:

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loading an externally generated program into a memory located in the optical reader;
and
executing the externally generated program to perform the task, whereby the step of executing the externally generated program includes replacing a portion of the optical reader program.

34. (Amended) A reprogrammable optical reader system, the optical reader system having a program stored in memory, the system comprising:

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a programming source having at least one software program, the at least one software corresponding to a predetermined task;
a transmission facility coupled to the programming source for transmitting the at least one software program; and
an optical reader coupled to the transmission facility, the optical reader being configured to receive and execute the at least one software program to thereby